

Message Text

PAGE 01 STATE 147628
ORIGIN AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DHA-02 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05 EB-07 OMB-01 TRSE-00 PC-01
/072 R

DRAFTED BY AF/C:ERILEY:LAR
APPROVED BY AF/C:TRBUCHANAN
-----078928 241932Z /53

P 241831Z JUN 77
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 147628

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: CG. SHUM, CM

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS: DRAFT COUNTRY ACTION PLAN

REF:

1. THE FOLLOWING DRAFT COUNTRY ACTION PLAN ON HUMAN RIGHTS FOR CAMEROON WAS PREPARED IN AF/C AND IS FORWARDED FOR EMBASSY COMMENT. SINCE REPORT WAS PREPARED AFTER DEPARTURE OF DESK OFFICER, IT IS SUBMITTED WITH DUE APOLOGIES FOR ANY DISTORTIONS OF FACT. AS PRESENT REQUIREMENTS CALL FOR SUBMISSION OF THE FINAL ACTION PLAN ON JULY 1, EMBASSY YAOUNDE IS REQUIRED TO SUBMIT ITS CONTENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS BY COB JUNE 29.

2. QUOTE:

-- 1. RESPECT FOR THE INTEGRITY OF THE PERSON

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 STATE 147628

THE PREAMBLE TO CAMEROON 1972 CONSTITUTION IDENTIFIES A WIDE RANGE OF BASIC LEGAL GUARANTEES WHICH ARE DESIGNED TO PROTECT PERSONAL LIBERTIES. THESE GUARANTEES CONFORM

CONFORM TO
TO BOTH THE UN CHARTER AND THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND ARE GENERALLY OBSERVED.

-- A. TORTURE AND INHUMAN OR DEGRADING PUNISHMENT ARE PROHIBITED IN CAMEROON. THIS PROHIBITION APPEARS TO BE

FOLLOWED IN PRACTICE AS WELL AS IN PRINCIPLE. HOWEVER, GENERAL PRISON CONDITIONS ARE DESCRIBED AS DEPLORABLE (FILTHY, OVERCROWDED, AND DISEASE-RIDDEN), AND PRISONERS ARE OFTEN ILL-CLOTHED AND POORLY FED. THESE CONDITIONS RESULT FROM FINANCIAL WOES AND NOT FROM DELIBERATE POLICIES.

-- B. ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND IMPRISONMENT, WHILE NOT UNCOMMON, ARE CERTAINLY NOT UNHEARD OF.

ACCORDING TO ESTIMATES MADE BY THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL TO THE PRESIDENCY, THERE ARE APPROXIMATELY 20 PERSONS BEING DETAINED FOR POLITICAL REASONS. THOSE ARE PREDOMINANTLY MILITANT MEMBERS OF THE OUTLAWED UPC PARTY WHO ARE CHARGED WITH ORGANIZING STRIKES IN DOUALA.

THIS FIGURE MAY BE A BIT LOW. OTHER SOURCES ESTIMATE THAT THE TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONS BEING DETAINED WITHOUT TRIAL IS SOMEWHERE BETWEEN 20 AND 100. FIFTY OTHERS HAVE ALREADY BEEN RELEASED.

IN GENERAL, CAMEROONIANS CAN OBTAIN EFFECTIVE LEGAL REMEDY IF THEIR RIGHTS ARE VIOLATED AND DUE PROCESS OF LAW
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 STATE 147628

OBTAINED. ONE MAJOR EXCEPTION -- COMPLAINTS ABOUT ABUSES COMMITTED BY MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES AND POLICE ARE OFTEN HANDLED ADMINISTRATIVELY WITHOUT ASSURANCE TO THE COMPLAINANT THAT PUNISHMENT HAS BEEN METED OUT.

-- C. INVASION OF THE HOME DOES NOT OCCUR WITH ANY GREAT FREQUENCY OR WITH THE GOVERNMENT SANCTION.

-- 2. RESPECT FOR CIVIL AND POLITICAL LIBERTIES

CIVIL AND POLITICAL LIBERTIES ARE CURTAILED TO SOME DEGREE IN CAMEROON BUT NOT THROUGH THE USE OF HARSH OR REPRESSIVE MEASURES. THE PRESIDENT MAY, WHEN CIRCUMSTANCES REQUIRE, PROCLAIM A STATE OF EMERGENCY OR A STATE OF SIEGE. IN THE FORMER CASE, SPECIAL POWERS ARE CONFERRED UPON HIM BY LAW. IN THE LATTER, HE MAY TAKE ALL ACTIONS DEEMED NECESSARY. IN 1975, A LONG TIME STATE OF SIEGE WAS LIFTED THROUGHOUT THE NATION WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A SMALL SECTION IN THE WESTERN PROVINCE.

-- A. THERE ARE NO RESTRICTIONS ON FREEDOM OF THOUGHT. IN FACT, CAMEROON IS CHARACTERIZED BY DIVERSE ETHNIC TRADITIONS WHICH ARE NOT ONLY TOLERATED BUT ENCOURAGED. "UNITY OUT OF DIVERSITY" IS PRESIDENT AHIDJO'S MOTTO.

THE PRESS, WHILE SUBJECTED TO OCCASIONAL GOVERNMENTAL CONTROL, IS OUTSPOKEN BY AFRICAN STANDARDS AND IS OFTEN A

SOURCE OF EMBARRASSMENT TO THE GOVERNMENT.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION IS GENERALLY OBSERVED IN A NATION WHICH IS PART CHRISTIAN AND PART MOSLEM (PRESIDENT AHIDJO IS MOSLEM).

-- B. FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT WITHIN THE NATION IS UNRESTRICTED BY LAW. IN PRACTICE, HOWEVER, TRAVELLERS ARE OFTEN STOPPED BY POLICE FOR IDENTITY CHECKS. THIS RITUAL CAN CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 STATE 147628

BE LONG AND COMPLICATED UNLESS A SMALL BRIBE IS OFFERED.

INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL AND EMIGRATION IS ALSO UNRESTRICTED. EXIT VISAS ARE REQUIRED AND ARE SOMETIMES DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN. THIS IS MOST OFTEN DUE TO BUREAUCRATIC RED TAPE BUT HAS ALSO RESULTED FROM GURC ATTEMPTS TO PREVENT CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS FROM LEAVING THE COUNTRY.

-- C. CAMEROON IS A ONE PARTY STATE AND POLITICAL PROCESS IN THE AMERICAN SENSE DOES NOT EXIST. HOWEVER, ON THE LOCAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL, THE GOVERNMENT DOES ALLOW FOR A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF DISCUSSION AND COMPETITION AMONG CANDIDATES WHO REPRESENT VARYING POLITICAL POINTS OF VIEW. ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL, ONCE A POLICY HAS BEEN DECIDED UPON, ITS IMPLEMENTATION IS GENERALLY SUPPORTED WITHOUT MUCH OPEN DISSENT.

-- 3. TRENDS IN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POLICY

GURC IS ACTIVELY SEEKING WAYS TO IMPROVE THE LIVING STANDARDS OF THE NATION'S POOREST SEGMENTS. AT LEAST ONE-HALF OF THE NEW FIVE YEAR PLAN (1976-81) DEALS WITH IMPROVING SOCIAL CONDITIONS. SPECIFICALLY, THE GOVERNMENT PLANS TO: EXPAND THE EDUCATIONAL AND HEALTH FACILITIES FOR BOTH THE URBAN AND RURAL PEOPLES, INCREASE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES, IMPROVE NON-FORMAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS, PROVIDE PROFESSIONAL TRAINING, AND INTEGRATE THE YOUTH INTO THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS.

PERHAPS CAMEROON'S MOST AMBITIOUS PLAN IS FOR THE CREATION OF A SOUND INFRASTRUCTURAL BASE. GURC HAS UNDERTAKEN A PROJECT TO IMPROVE THE RAIL LINK BETWEEN YAOUNDE AND DOUALA

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 05 STATE 147628

IN THE EXPECTATION THAT A MODERN AND EFFICIENT TRANSPORT SYSTEM WILL SPUR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND BENEFIT THE RURAL POPULATIONS. THERE IS CONSIDERABLE BASIS FOR THIS OPTIMISM SINCE THE COMPLETION OF THE NORTHERN SECTION RESULTED IN

AN INCREASED AMOUNT OF GOODS BEING SHIPPED AT LOWER PRICES, BETTER NUTRITIONAL LEVELS, AND GREATER ACCESS TO SCHOOLS, MARKETS, AND HEALTH FACILITIES.

-- B. CORRUPTION, ALTHOUGH REPORTEDLY ON THE RISE, IS A MINOR PROBLEM IN CAMEROON. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF RESOURCES IS BEING DIVERTED TOWARD THE NATION'S ELITES AND AWAY FROM THE MAJORITY OF THE POPULATION.

-- 4. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GOVERNMENT

THE GURC CAN BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR MANY OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS WHICH DO EXIST, BUT IT IS GENERALLY A BENEVOLENT GOVERNMENT WHICH DOES NOT PURSUE AN ACTIVE POLICY OF SUPPRESSION.

POLITICALLY, THE GOVERNMENT DOES NOT ALLOW THE EXISTENCE OF OPPOSITION PARTIES. MOST OF THE CURTAILMENTS OF CIVIL LIBERTIES RESULT FROM GURC'S ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL THOSE INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS THAT IT FEELS THREATEN THE RULING PARTY'S CONTROL. THE LONG PERIOD OF UPC INSURGENCY AND WHAT IS SEEN AS A STRENGTHENING OF INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST INFLUENCE IN NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES IN THE WAKE OF THE DEFEAT OF PRO-WEST FACTIONS IN ANGOLA HAS MADE THE GURC LEADERSHIP UNDERSTANDABLY NERVOUS.

ECONOMICALLY AND SOCIALLY, THE GOVERNMENT IS PURSUING THE HUMAN RIGHTS OBJECTIVES AS PART OF ITS OFFICIAL POLICY. THE LEADERS HAVE PLACED A HEAVY EMPHASIS ON DEVELOPING "HUMAN RESOURCES" AND HAVE DISPLAYED AN ABILITY TO OUTLINE AND PURSUE SOUND ECONOMIC PROGRAMS DESIGNED TO AMELIORATE
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 06 STATE 147628

CONDITIONS IN THE POOREST SECTORS.

-- 5. COOPERATION WITH INVESTIGATIONS

IN THE PAST, GURC HAS BEEN QUITE WILLING TO ALLOW OUTSIDE INVESTIGATIONS INTO HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS. AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WAS INVITED TO ATTEND A SERIES OF POLITICAL TRIALS IN 1971, FOREIGN JOURNALISTS OPERATE FREELY, PREVIOUS U.S. INQUIRIES WERE ALLOWED AND THE RESULTING REPORTS ACCEPTED BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS.

-- B. ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

-- THREE-SIX MONTH TIME FRAME

THE MAJOR HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES IN CAMEROON ARE VIOLATIONS AGAINST THE ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF THE PEOPLE WHICH CAN NOT BE CORRECTED WITHIN A TIME PERIOD AS SHORT AS 3-6

MONTHS.

-- 12 MONTHS TIME FRAME

THE US SHOULD STRENGTHEN ITS EFFORTS TO PROMOTE ECONOMIC PROGRESS, INDEPENDENCE AND DIVERSIFICATION IN THE CAMEROON.

ACHIEVEMENT OF THESE OBJECTIVES WILL CONTRIBUTE DIRECTLY TO AN IMPROVEMENT IN THE LIVING STANDARDS OF MOST CAMEROONIANS AND CONTINUATION OF A STABLE AND MODERATE GOVERNMENT. THE U.S. IS ALREADY ASSISTING THE GURC TO MEET ITS DEVELOPMENT GOALS, AND HAS AID PROJECTS UNDERWAY WHICH RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF THE NATION'S POOR. THESE INCLUDE PROJECTS WHICH DEAL WITH: THE DEVELOPMENT OF IMPROVED SEED VARIETIES FOR SUBSISTENCE FOOD CROPS (ESP. PEANUTS, SORGHUM, AND
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 07 STATE 147628

MAIZE), LIVESTOCK PRACTICES, RURAL HEALTH AND NUTRITIONAL SERVICES, AND LOW COST URBAN HOUSING.

CAMEROON HAS BEEN RECEIVING SUBSTANTIAL INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT IN ITS DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES THROUGH THE WORLD BANK AND THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY (ESPECIALLY FRANCE), AS WELL AS OTHER BILATERAL PROGRAMS (CANADA AND TO A LESSER DEGREE THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA. WE CONTRIBUTE, OF COURSE, TO IBRD PROGRAMS.

PRIVATE FIRMS AND BANKING INSTITUTIONS HAVE ALSO BEEN HELPFUL IN DEVELOPING CAMEROON'S RESOURCE POTENTIAL, AND DUE TO THE NATION'S STABILITY AND FAVORABLE INVESTMENT CODE, THIS TREND CAN BE EXPECTED TO CONTINUE, WITH U.S. BANKS AND FIRMS HOPEFULLY PLAYING A LARGER ROLE.

OUR PRESENT AID PROJECTS ARE WELL DESIGNED TO MEET CAMEROON'S NEEDS, BUT UNTIL RECENTLY HAVE NOT BEEN ENTIRELY RESPONSIVE TO DECLARED GURC PRIORITIES. GURC HAS COMPARATIVELY SOUND PLANNING PROCEDURES AND INSTITUTIONS AND IS QUITE CAPABLE OF DETERMINING ITS OWN NEEDS AND WANTS. THE US SHOULD RECOGNIZE THIS CAPABILITY AND SEEK TO BE MORE RESPONSIVE TO GURC'S STATED PRIORITIES. WE SHOULD SEE WHETHER WE CAN DO MORE IN THE DISADVANTAGED ANGLOPHONE AREA.

IN GENERAL, THE HUMAN RIGHTS PICTURE IN CAMEROON IS A RELATIVELY GOOD ONE. IF THE U.S. CAN CONTINUE ITS AID TO

THE CAMEROON, AND ASSIST THE GOVERNMENT WITH ITS PROGRAMS OF ECONOMIC REFORM, CONDITIONS SHOULD IMPROVE EVEN FURTHER.

THE ONLY RESISTANCE THAT THE US MIGHT ENCOUNTER WOULD BE AS THE RESULT OF OVERLY-ZEALOUS ATTEMPTS TO PRESSURE THE GOVERNMENT INTO UNACCEPTABLE POLITICAL CHANGES. BUT THE

BASIS FOR SUCH A CONFLICT DOES NOT APPEAR TO EXIST TODAY.
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 08 STATE 147628

-- 2. REACTION IN THE HOST COUNTRY

OUR NEW HUMAN RIGHTS' EMPHASIS SHOULD BE FAVORABLY RECEIVED BY MOST SEGMENTS OF CAMEROONIAN SOCIETY. THE GURC HAS EXPRESSED ITS APPROVAL OF THE US STAND ON HUMAN RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE REFERENCE TO VIOLATIONS IN UGANDA AND EQUATORIAL GUINEA.

PRESIDENT CARTER'S POLICIES, INCLUDING HIS POSITION ON HUMAN RIGHTS, HAS RECEIVED A FAVORABLE RESPONSE FROM THE STUDENT POPULATION WHICH TENDS TO BE ANTI-AMERICAN. CHURCH OFFICIALS ARE ALSO EXPECTED TO WELCOME THE NEW EMPHASIS.

3. IMPLICATIONS FOR CHANGE

-- IN THE ECONOMIC SPHERE, THE US AND GURC'S GOALS SEEM COMPLEMENTARY. IMPROVEMENT IN THE CONDITIONS FACED BY THE RURAL POOR WOULD RESULT IN A BETTER LIFE STYLE GENERALLY FOR THE POPULATION. THE OBJECTIVES OF BOTH OUR NATIONS WOULD BE SERVED.

ON THE POLITICAL SIDE, OUR BEST ALLIES FOR REFORM ARE THE EDUCATED ANGLOPHONES WHO FEEL THAT THEY HAVE SUFFERED, BOTH POLITICALLY AND CULTURALLY, AT THE HANDS, OF THEIR FRANCOPHONE COUNTRYMEN. THE ANGLOPHONES BELIEVE THAT THEY WOULD STAND TO BENEFIT FROM A MORE OPEN AND RESPONSIVE GOVERNMENT.

-- 4. IMPACT ON U.S. INTERESTS

CAMEROON IS OF CONSIDERABLE IMPORTANCE TO THE U.S. SINCE IT PLAYS A MODERATE, RESPONSIBLE, AND PRO-WESTERN ROLE IN
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 09 STATE 147628

THE AREA AND ON THE CONTINENT. IT IS THUS IN THE U.S. INTEREST TO STRENGTHEN CAMEROONIAN STABILITY. TO THE EXTENT THAT WE ARE ABLE THROUGH OUR BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL PROGRAMS TO ASSIST GURC'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TO DECREASE THEIR WORRIES ABOUT NEIGHBORING PRO-COMMUNIST REGIMES (NOTABLY IN EQUATORIAL GUINEA AND CONGO-BRAZZAVILLE) WE WILL BE SERVING BOTH OUR ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL MOTIVES AND OUR HUMAN RIGHTS OBJECTIVES.

AS NOTED ABOVE, CAMEROON HAS ALREADY EXPRESSED ITS APPROVAL OF THE US STAND ON HUMAN RIGHTS. WE COULD ENSURE A GREATER CAMEROONIAN EMPHASIS ON THE ISSUE, IF WE OFFERED TO SUPPORT GURC AND OTHER AFRICAN STATES' EFFORTS TO BRING VIOLATIONS

IN UGANDA AND EQUATORIAL GUINEA BEFORE THE UNITED NATIONS'
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION. CHRISTOPHER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 22-Sep-1999 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: HUMAN RIGHTS, REPORTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 24-Jun-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977STATE147628
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: AF/C:ERILEY:LAR
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: 11652 GDS
Errors: n/a
Expiration:
Film Number: D770227-0105
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t197706110/baaaetcq.tel
Line Count: 330
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, TEXT ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 741f9e73-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 7
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23-Dec-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2013238
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: HUMAN RIGHTS: DRAFT COUNTRY ACTION PLAN
TAGS: SHUM, CG, CM
To: YAOUNDE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/741f9e73-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009